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THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

Ἡ δὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀνὰ τὴν χάριν αὐτοῦ, ἀγαθὴν πρόδοσιν αἰρᾷ ἀνὰ τὸν οὐρανὸν δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.

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JOHN WYCLIFFE.

AMONG the many peculiar features of English scenery which attract the notice of the passing stranger, perhaps the most interesting spots, at least in some localities, are its country church-yards. To a thoughtful observer, there will always be a kind of melancholy pleasure in contemplating the final resting-place of those who have already passed through the troubled ocean of existence, and who, "after life's fitful fever," have at last attained to the quiet haven of the grave, where all at length hope to find repose. If the burial-ground, as is almost always the case in England, is kept with suitable neatness and care, the eye can wander over the scattered hillocks which break the smoothness of the grassy turf; and the imagination, not disturbed by unpleasant associations, can lose itself in conjectures respecting the history of those who now sleep in peace, and whose only record, perhaps, is to be found in a few mouldering lines on the mossy stones which overhang their earthly remains. Sometimes the grave-yard has not been used for many years, and then (in the beautiful words of a celebrated writer), "no newly erected tomb disturbs the sober serenity of our reflections, by reminding us of recent calamity; and no rank-springing grass forces upon our imagination the recollection that it owes its dark luxuriance to the festering remnants of mortality which ferment beneath. The daisy which sprinkles the sod, and the harebell which hangs over it, derive their pure nourishment from the dew of heaven, and their growth impresses us with no degrading or disgusting recollections. Death has, indeed, been there, and its traces are before us; but they are softened and deprived of their horror by our distance from the period when they have been first impressed. Those who sleep beneath are only connected with us by the reflection, that they have once been what we now are, and that, as their relics are now identified with their mother earth, ours shall, at some future period, undergo the same transformation." Surely, it might be thought that the presence of such solemn associations ought in all cases to dispel every angry feeling from the most obdurate breast, and leave no emotion behind, save one of kindly sympathy and regard for those who were once sharers in the same frail human nature, and have now yielded to the common lot of humanity:—

"Hark! how the sacred calm that breathes around,
Bids every fierce tumultuous passion cease;
In still small accents whispering from the ground
A grateful earnest of eternal peace."

* Scott's "Old Mortality," chap. I.

Gray's Elegy in a Country Church-yard, St. 4. It has often been remarked that the language and forms of words in use among any people afford a plain indication of the ideas prevalent among them at the time when these words were first brought into use. Let us take, for example, our English word *cemetery*, which, as all our readers know, means a burial ground. But it may be new to some of them to be told that this word is formed, with scarcely any change, from the Greek *κοιμητήριον*, which properly means a sleeping room, or place of rest. We are informed by St. Chrysostom that the early Christians denoted the grave by this name, in order to testify their belief in the resurrection, "The place itself is called a cemetery," saith he, "that thou mayst learn that the dead, and those who lie in the grave, are not dead, but have lain down to sleep." (St. Chrysost. Hom. 81. Tom. v. p. 563, apud Suicer, sub voce). The name was obviously founded on that passage of St. Paul's Epistles where he speaks of departed Christians as those who "sleep in Jesus" (1. Thess. iv. 14). The idea thus brought before our minds respecting the state of departed friends is obviously full of hope and comfort. Now, we beg to ask our readers one question. Is it likely that St. Paul would have described the state of departed Christians, by the words "who sleep in Jesus," or would the early Church have called its burial grounds by the name of *cemeteries*, or sleeping-places, if either he or they had believed in the frightful torments of purgatory?

Spots such as these, however, have not at all times been secure from the inroads of religious bigotry and intolerance; nor have the frail and mouldering relics of men, who in their time were advocates of God's truth upon earth, been always allowed to repose in peace in their deep and narrow bed. Let our readers transport themselves in thought to the quiet church-yard of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, to a period about four centuries ago, in the year 1428. This place is now a thriving town, and of considerable population; but at the time of which we speak, it consisted of a few scattered houses on the banks of the river Swift; and it was chiefly remarkable for its parish church, built, it is supposed, by Lord Ferrars, of Groby, and destined, as we shall presently see, to hold a conspicuous place in the ecclesiastical annals of England. Let us pass by the tower surmounted with its four turrets, and enter the nave of the church. At its further end, where it is separated from the chancel by a beautiful screen, a large group of persons is collected. They are dressed in long black garments, the usual ecclesiastical robe of the period, and they are surrounded by servants and others, carrying spades and pickaxes. What is the cause of this unwonted assemblage at such a place and time?

The story is soon told. The persons whom we see before us have come for the express purpose of *digging up the bones* of a man who had died nearly half a century before. He had formerly been the parish priest of Lutterworth; and when death, at length, called him away, full of years and honours, his body was laid in the ground, not far from the oak pulpit from which he had so often taught the people committed to his charge the truths of the everlasting Gospel. The Council of Constance, however, thought fit to pronounce him to be a heretic, and had consigned his memory, in due form, to infamy and execration. An order was issued that "his body and bones, if they might be discerned and known from the bodies of other faithful people, should be taken out of the ground, and thrown far away from the burial of any church, according unto the canon laws and decrees." This decree was passed A.D. 1415; but, whether from a disregard of the authority of the Council in England, or some lingering remnant of better feeling on the part of those who should have executed the decree, the so-called heretic was allowed to repose quietly in his grave until the year 1428. In that year, Richard Fleming, Bishop of Lincoln, who had not long before returned from Italy, where he had attended the Council of Sienna, was resolved to give the world a striking proof of his zeal for the orthodox Romish faith. In his early days he had been an ardent follower of the parish priest of Lutterworth; but, like most men who change their minds, he became eager, in time, to persecute the memory of the man whose opinions he had abandoned.

Accordingly, as we have described above, he sent his officers upon the ungracious errand of carrying out the decree of the Council of Constance in all its cruel particularity. They came to Lutterworth in a body.—Sumner, Commissary, Archdeacon, Official, Chancellor, Proctors, Doctors, servants, and all; inasmuch that (in the language of an old historian) "the remnant of the body would not hold out a bone amongst so many hands." It may well be conceived that after the lapse of so many years it was no easy matter for them to make sure that they were digging up the right body, after all. We quite agree with the pithy remarks of the worthy martyrologist, when describing the particulars of the scene. "What Heraclitus would not laugh, or what Democritus would not weep, to see these so sage and reverend Catoes, to occupy their heads to take up a poor man's body so long dead and buried before, by the space of 41 yeeres, and yet, peradventure, were not able to find his right bones, but tooke up some other body, and so of a Catholike made a heretike." However, right or wrong, the uncharitable work was carried out to its close. The tomb was robbed of its tenant, such bones as could be found were burnt, and the ashes were thrown into the river Swift, which flows hard by the church-yard.

* This pulpit is still in existence. It is made of thick oak planks, of a hexagonal shape, and has a seam of carved work in the joints.

† Fox, Acts and Monuments, Tom. i. p. 606. London, 1641.

‡ Fuller, Church History, vol. iii. p. 424. Oxford, 1845.

§ Fox, ut supra, Tom. i. p. 606.

¶ In an edition of Fox's Martyrology, which is now before us, dated 1641, there is a curious old woodcut, representing the scene

And now, some persons may be disposed to ask, what was the name of the man whose mortal remains were thus cruelly dealt with, or what had he done to make himself obnoxious to the chief authorities of the Roman Catholic Church in England? It was JOHN WYCLIFFE—a name for ever memorable as that of the first teacher who shook with any lasting effect the dominion of the Romish hierarchy,—who sowed deep in the popular mind thoughts, opinions, and convictions, which eventually led to the emancipation of a good part of the Christian world from the usurped authority of the Roman Pontiff. Nay, more, it was the name of the man who first conferred upon the English people the priceless treasure of the Word of God, translated into their own mother tongue. Such being his character, a short account of the life and labours of this remarkable man will, we doubt not, prove interesting to many of our readers.

About six miles from the town of Richmond, in Yorkshire, is the small village of Wycliffe, which, from the Norman Conquest to the end of the sixteenth century, was the residence of a family of the same name. In this village, or its immediate vicinity, there is good reason to believe that John Wycliffe was born, about the year 1324. His destination, either from his own choice or the wise providence of his parents, was that of a scholar, to which the humblest could in those days aspire. Oxford was the scene of his studies and of his future glory. He was first admitted at Queen's College, but speedily removed to Merton, and in that seat of learning, illustrious for the names of Thomas Bradwardine, the "profound doctor," Walter Burley, the "perspicuous doctor," and the renowned William Occam, the "singular doctor," it was the lot of Wycliffe to acquire a title more truly honourable than any of those just enumerated, that of the *Evangelic or gospel doctor*. Like all other students of his day who aspired to eminence, he, of course, devoted himself with intense application to the scholastic philosophy; inasmuch that Knighton, who was a canon of Leicester, contemporary with Wycliffe, and a cordial hater of him, his doctrines, and his followers, describes him as "second to none in philosophy, and in scholastic studies altogether incomparable." His theological principles were formed by a diligent perusal of the primitive Christian writers; and chiefly of four of the most distinguished fathers of the Church, Augustine, Jerom, Basil, and Gregory. But the studies of Wycliffe were most nobly distinguished from those of his contemporaries by his ardent devotion to the word of God, which eventually won for him the illustrious appellation above alluded to, of the "evangelic or gospel doctor," and which, above all his other accomplishments, qualified him to impress a permanent influence on future generations.

It is, fortunately, somewhat difficult for us, in these times of free inquiry, to form a just idea of the courage and independence of mind and strength of purpose, implied in the resolution of a teacher of theology, in the fourteenth century, to take his stand upon the Bible. On the one hand, such an instructor had to encounter the frown of Papal infallibility, which forbade all appeal to the Scriptures; and on the other hand, there awaited him the contemptuous scowl of the defenders of the scholastic philosophy. In this and the two preceding centuries, the compilations of Peter Lombard, the Master of the Sentences, were in much more universal estimation than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "The graduate," says Roger Bacon, "who reads (or lectures in) the text of Scripture, is compelled to give way to the reader of the Sentences, who everywhere enjoys honour and pre-

here described. The stream of the Swift is in the foreground. On the bank of the river is a coffin labelled "Wickliff's Bones." The Official (or all the principal figures in the woodcut bear the names of their offices on their robes) is employed in taking a large thigh bone out of the coffin. The Archdeacon and the Sumner are throwing other bones into the fire, which is blazing brightly, while the Commissary is pouring the ashes into the river. In the background is the church of Lutterworth. There is a total disregard of perspective, as is generally the case in such representations; but the woodcut has the merit of exhibiting the ideas current in England, about the disinterment, more than two centuries ago.

¶ In the following sketch, we have borrowed freely from the interesting and eloquent life of Wycliffe, written by Professor Le Bas, London, 1832, to which we would be ungrateful if we did not confess our obligations. We have not followed him, however, in the orthography of the name of the Reformer.

† Doctor in theologia eminentissimus in diebus illis. In philosophia nulli reputatur secundus; in scholasticis disciplinis incomparabilis. —Le Bas, ut supra, p. 94, note.

cedence. He who reads the Sentences has the choice of his hour, and ample entertainment among the religious orders. He who reads the Bible is destitute of these advantages, and sues like a mendicant, to the reader of the Sentences, for the use of such hour as it may please him to grant. He who reads the *Sums of Divinity* is everywhere allowed to hold disputations, and is venerated as master; he who only reads the text of Scripture is not permitted to dispute at all, which is absurd." Such is the language of the illustrious Friar Bacon in the thirteenth century. That of John Salisbury, in the twelfth century, was still stronger. He tells us that in his time the mere scriptural teachers were "not only rejected as philosophers, but unwillingly endured as clergymen—nay, were scarcely acknowledged to be men. They became objects of derision, and were termed the bullocks of Abraham, or the asses of Balaam."¹ And yet, in this state of the public mind it was that Wycliffe had the courage and the independence to associate the study of the Scriptures with the keenest pursuit of the scholastic metaphysics; and not only so, but to assign to the Word of God the full supremacy which belongs to it, as disclosing to us "the way, the truth, and the life" (John, xiv. 6.).

The first open trial of Wycliffe's powers against the corruptions of the time was in the year 1356, when he put forth a small tract entitled "The Last Age of the Church."² We have not space to enter upon an examination of the character of this tract as a prophetic work; but it is extremely valuable as a manifestation of the vigour with which Wycliffe was girding himself up for a conflict with the powers and principalities of the Papal Empire. He loudly and keenly arraigned the vices of the clergy, and declared that among them was the seat of the national maladies with which the realm of England was then afflicted. Like Jeremiah of old, he proclaimed that from the prophet to the priest every man dealt falsely; that by their rapacity they "ate up the people as it were bread;" that their sensuality was such as sent up a savour that infected the earth and "smelt to heaven."³

When we examine into the condition of the Church of Rome in the fourteenth century, it is a marvel how it could have commanded either respect or obedience on the part of any portion of the Christian world. Sure we are, that if the scenes and events which then took place, were enacted over again in the nineteenth century, it would be very difficult for the Pope or Cardinals to preserve the spiritual allegiance of any of the kingdoms which are now submissive to their will. Among the principles which lie at the root of the Papal system, two of the most important, as our readers must be aware, are these:—that Rome is the capital of the Christian world; and that the Pope, as Bishop of Rome, is the infallible centre of Catholic unity. The course of events in the fourteenth century demonstrated the weakness and hollowness of these two assumptions, in a way which, it might be thought, no one could misunderstand. At the very beginning of this century, in the year 1305, Pope Clement V., who was a Frenchman, transferred his court from Rome to Avignon. Professing as he did to be the successor of St. Peter, he was the first Pontiff who insulted the traditional chair and tomb of the Apostle by continual and voluntary absence. His example was followed by his successors until the year 1378; and thus, for a period of more than seventy years, the pontifical authority, which was united by so many ties to the name of Rome, which in its nature was essentially Italian, and which claimed a boundless extent of despotism, was exercised by foreigners, in a foreign land, under the sceptre of a foreign prince. What would be thought of Pope Pius IX. in our own day, if he was permanently to quit Rome, and take up his abode in some remote part of Germany?

The conduct of the Popes and their followers, moreover, during this lengthened period, was such as almost to destroy men's belief in the truth of Christianity altogether. The shameless profligacy of the Papal Court at Avignon is, indeed, a fact about which there is no dispute; and even moderate writers have been obliged to use the severest language, in order to present a just picture of its deformity. We do not refer to the partial philippics of Petrarch, nor to the unholy name of Babylon, which may first have been affixed to the city of the Popes from a similarity in crime. But when a grave writer like Denina assures us that the licentiousness of the clergy became excessive and universal, from the time that the scandals of Avignon had removed all restraint and shame, and when Sismondi declares that the people and court of Avignon had adopted the vices of all other nations as their ordinary habits and manners—those historians do not exceed the testimony of contemporary authorities.⁴ Whatever may have been the comparative delinquencies of Rome and Avignon, it is at least certain that the latter were more indecent and more notorious; that offences which (if they were really practised) had been heretofore veiled, or only partially known, were now ex-

posed and stigmatised universally; and that the only alternative henceforward remaining to the Papal government was to correct those flagrant abuses, or by their means to fall.

In the year 1378 the Popes resumed their residence at Rome; and that very year the authority of the Pontiff, as the centre of Catholic unity, received a fatal blow, one from which, in spite of the utmost ingenuity of its warmest partisans, it has never since been able entirely to recover. There is, it must be confessed, something very captivating to the popular mind in the idea of a line of bishops, each in his day a living, infallible centre of unity to the whole Christian Church, ready to solve all their doubts, and to make known to them at all times with unerring certainty the true doctrines of the Gospel. We feel sure that this notion of a living, infallible head of the Church is more effectual than any other part of the system of the Church of Rome in inducing men to come over to her communion, or to continue in it. But when the world, in September, 1378, saw two Popes, Urban VI. and Clement VII., each claiming to be the true Bishop of Rome, and as such entitled to the spiritual allegiance of the faithful, what became of the living centre of unity?⁵ And still more, when in the beginning of the fifteenth century the two Popes were increased to three, and when the Council of Constance, in the plenitude of its power, swept away all three⁶ to make room for a fourth, under the title of Martin V., must not the simple, confiding Christians of those days, who were taught by their priests to distrust their own private judgment, and defer in all points to the authority of the Church, have been sorely puzzled what to believe? The grand schism of the Roman Catholic Church in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is, and ever will be, a fatal stumbling-block in the way of those zealous controversialists who maintain the doctrine of Papal infallibility.⁷ To this day Roman Catholic writers are not agreed as to who were the true and who were the false Popes in those troubled times; and thus the whole theory falls to the ground, like a heavy chain, when some of its chief links are snapped asunder.

The consideration of the state of the Roman Catholic Church in the days of Wycliffe has interrupted our narrative of the life of the Reformer, to which we must now return. His personal history may be briefly dispatched; for his career can scarcely be said to have been marked by any strange or romantic events. His life was a continual contest with the abuses which were everywhere prevalent in his day; and thus he resembles in some degree the pioneer who hews a road through some dense and tangled forest, in order that those who come after him may enjoy free and unrestricted access to the flowers and fruits which it contains.

The year 1372 was memorable for Wycliffe's promotion to the degree of Doctor of Divinity, and for his elevation to the theological chair of Oxford. About this time, he published a copious exposition of the Decalogue. A plain, Scriptural explanation of the Ten Commandments, in the English tongue, may seem to us no mighty achievement for so renowned a doctor. In those times, however, there can be no doubt that such a work was a phenomenon of great rarity and vast importance. He himself tells us, in his preface, that it was then no uncommon thing for men "to call God Master for forty, three-score, or four-score years; and yet to remain ignorant of his Ten Commandments." To lay His divine law before the world in all its purity was, in such an age, a noble service to the Church.

It was by his fearless and unsparing attack on the mendicant friars, however, that Wycliffe, some years before this period, rose to the height of fame and popularity at Oxford. Dr. Lingard, the modern Roman Catholic historian of England, has been pleased to describe this as a ridiculous controversy.⁸ Ridiculous enough it unquestionably was, if considered purely with reference to the impudence, the hypocrisy, and the imposture which it exposed; but nothing could well be more grave and serious, if estimated by the shock which it inflicted on the fabric of the Papal power.

The order of begging friars, it will be remembered, was established early in the thirteenth century, at a time when the wealth of the great monastic establishments had converted most of them into gigantic monuments of pride and sensuality, to which the enemies of superstition were perpetually pointing, when they were desirous of awakening the world to the duty of demolishing the abuses of the Church. The Papacy, thus surrounded by

enemies, accepted with gladness the services of an order which promised to exhibit to the world an image of primitive simplicity and self-denial, and to emulate, in its contempt of wealth and austerity of demeanour, the greatest champions of ecclesiastical reform. The most ample and honourable privileges were accordingly lavished on those fraternities which made a voluntary vow of poverty, and whose members were ready to disperse themselves throughout Christendom, relying for their support on the alms of the faithful.

For a considerable time the new institution did its office to admiration. The genius of their system penetrated quickly into every department of the Church. It intruded itself into the region of parochial duty; it seated itself in the confessional; it seized on the chair of the professor in the university; it grasped the crozier of episcopacy. The distinguished honours heaped on the mendicant system had the effect, however, of enormously multiplying its numbers; until at length, in 1272, Gregory X. found it necessary to repress these "extravagant swarms" of holy beggars, and to confine the institution to the four denominations of Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, and Hermits of St. Augustine. But the immoderate increase of their numbers was not the only circumstance which tended to lower the respect of Christians for their itinerant teachers. In the course of time, these professors of poverty were often found transformed into prodigies of wealth; and men beheld with astonishment the barefooted friars, to whom property was an accursed thing, becoming gradually, by some strange process, the lords of stately houses and ample possessions.

It was in the year 1221 that these so-called monkish reformers first made their appearance in England. They were patronized at first by Bishop Grossete, the greatest ecclesiastical name of that age; but he lived long enough to denounce them as the heaviest curse that could be inflicted on the cause of Christianity. The monkish chronicles are filled with complaints of the rapacity, ambition and turbulence of the mendicant orders. "It is matter of melancholy presage," says Matthew Paris, "that within the four-and-twenty years of their establishment in England these friars have piled up their mansions to a royal altitude. Impudently transgressing the bounds of poverty, the very basis of their profession, they exhibit inestimable treasures within their lofty walls. They beset the dying bed of the noble and the wealthy, in order to extort secret bequests from the fears of guilt or superstition. As the agents of Papal extortion, they are incessantly applying the arts of flattery, the stings of rebuke, or the terrors of confession."⁹ The Church of Rome boasts that she is unchangeable; and when we compare the conduct of her priests in the nineteenth century with that of her friars in the thirteenth, it must be admitted that in one point at least—namely, in the methods which they use to collect money—there seems to be occasionally some slight resemblance.

England at last was so overrun by swarms of friars, and so disturbed by their disorders, that the ancient records of the kingdom, which are still preserved, are filled with warrants for the arrest of the sanctimonious vagrants.¹⁰ It was against this crying abuse that Wycliffe, in the year 1360, took up his pen; and our readers will now be better able to appreciate whether the controversy was as ridiculous as Dr. Lingard would fain describe it to be. To his latest breath, Wycliffe never ceased to denounce the friars as the pests of society—as the bitter enemies of all pure religion—as monsters of arrogance, hypocrisy, and covetousness—in short, as no other than the tail of the Apocalyptic dragon, which was to sweep away a third part of the stars from the firmament of the Church.¹¹

In a treatise which was published by Wycliffe, some twenty years later, "against the Orders of Friars," one of their practices is described, which is too remarkable to be passed over unnoticed. He charges them with deceiving and pillaging the people, by their "letters of fraternity," which he describes as "powdred with hypocrisy, covetise, simonie, blasphemie, and other leasings (lies)." These precious documents, it seems, were written on fine vellum, splendidly illuminated, under the seal of the fraternity, and covered with sarsnet, and they conveyed to the faithful and wealthy purchaser an assurance of his participation in the masses, vigils, and other religious exercises of the holy brotherhood, both during his life and after his death, so that they provided the sinner, who was able to purchase them, with a sort of running dispensation, which always kept pace with the utmost speed of his transgressions. By this shameless enormity, as Wycliffe forcibly remarks, "they passen (surpass) bishoppes, popes, and eke God himself. For they grant no pardon, but if (except) men be contrite and shiven, and of merite of Christ's passion, and other saints; but friars make no mention nether of contrition ne (nor) shrift, ne merite of Christ's passion, but only of their own good deeds."

An equally mournful picture of the state of the Church in England at that time may be derived from Wycliffe's

¹ "Nec modo philosophos negant, imo nec clericos patiuntur, vix homines sinunt esse; sed boves Abraham, vel asinos Balaamitas duntaxat nominant." Quoted in Turner's List of England, vol. i., p. 506, Note (66). Le Bas ut supra, p. 96.

² This work has been recently published, from a manuscript in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, by the learned librarian, Dr. Todd. Le Bas, ut supra, p. 102.

³ Denina, Delle rivoluzioni d'Italia, lib. xiv. cap. 6. Sismondi, Rep. Ital. cap. xlviii.

⁴ Selden, in his Table Talk, says: "There was once, I am sure, a Parliamentary Pope. Pope Urban was made Pope in England, by Act of Parliament, against Pope Clement; the act is not in the Book of Statutes, but it is upon the Rolls."—Att. "Pope."

⁵ We translate the very words of an old inscription in monkish verse, which we remember to have read on a stone over the doorway of the building in which the Council was held. One of the lines of the inscription runs thus:—

"Hos omnes abigit synodus quam tu tenuisti!"

⁶ i.e., "The Council held in you [that is, the Council-chamber] drove them all away." Poor Popes! whether true or false, it was rather scurvy conduct in the Council to turn them all out of doors!

⁷ To use Wycliffe's own words, "The Head of Antichrist was cloven in twain, and the two parts made to fight against each other." Le Bas, p. 199.

⁸ "It was about the year 1360 that the name of Wycliffe is first mentioned in history. He was then engaged in a fierce but ridiculous controversy with the various orders of friars."—Lingard, vol. iv., p. 213.

⁹ Matth. Paris, p. 541. Ed. 1684.

¹⁰ See Turner's History of England, vol. ii., p. 413, note 63, which contains various references to such orders in the reigns of Henry III., Edward I., and Edward II. Among them is one general order "for arresting religious vagabonds all over the kingdom" (de religiosi vagabundis arrestandis per totum regnum).

¹¹ Le Bas, ut supra, p. 113.

tract "How the office of Curates is ordained of God." The language of this tract is quite as uncompromising as that with which he assailed the abuses of mendicancy. Many of the secular clergy of those days, if we are to believe the Reformer, were infamous for ostentation, sensuality, and avarice. Their doctrine was no better than their example. "They taught," he says, "sinful men to buy hell full dear." They maintained their influence by an impious prostitution of the power of the keys, and extorted, by the terror of their spiritual censures, the money and the obedience of their enslaved congregations. In some instances the parish priests entered into an unholy partnership with the objects of their secret jealousy and hate, the itinerant friars and pardoners. "For when there cometh a pardoner to rich places, with stolen bulls and false relics, granting more years of pardon than come before doomsday, for gaining worldly wealth, he shall be received of curates, to have a part of that which he getteth." This tract was one of Wycliffe's latest performances; and it proves, that every day he lived only gave additional keenness to his perception of the evils which overran the Church, and additional intensity to his desire for their correction.

We have intentionally avoided all mention of the political controversies into which Wycliffe entered with the Pope and his advocates, on behalf of the royal supremacy, and the right of the English nation to be exempt from the payment of Peter's pence, and other badges of subjection. This would have led us too far from our immediate subject, which was, to set before our readers a picture of the abuses of the Church of Rome in the fourteenth century, drawn from contemporaneous authors; and they will now be the better able to judge how far a reformation was needed. We would gladly have described the Reformer in the retirement of his parish at Lutterworth (to which he was presented by the Crown in 1375), and dwelt on the pure and Scriptural character of his teaching. Sundays and holidays he performed the offices of a diligent and edifying pastor. His people, probably, might at first have expected to hear of the good offices of the saints, or of the maternal influence and authority of the Blessed Virgin, who alone could secure the effective intercession of her Son, in behalf of transgression against the laws of the Father. Not a syllable of all this did they hear from the parson of Lutterworth. He refers directly and solely to the only Name given under heaven whereby men can be saved (Acts iv., 12), and this in language which might entirely become a Protestant pulpit at the present day. Above all, we would have wished to give some account of that immortal service performed for his country by Wycliffe, when he put forth his translation of the Bible in the English tongue; when (according to the reluctant testimony of Dr. Lingard) "the seeds were sown of that religious revolution which, in little more than a century, astonished and convulsed the nations of Europe." We do not desire, however, entirely to exhaust the patience of our readers, and, therefore, we must defer these interesting topics to some future opportunity.

The Reformer was finally taken to his rest on the 31st of December, 1384, in the sixty-first year of his age. Although he had, throughout his life, been the steadfast opponent of the Papacy, and although the friars and others whose wrath he had provoked frequently compassed his death by every variety of machination, yet he went to his grave in peace. "It was admirable," writes the quaint old historian, Fuller, "that a hare so often hunted with so many packs of dogs should die at last quietly sitting in his form." It may amuse our readers to read the epitaph which was composed for him by a monk. It is utterly undeserving of notice, except as affording a curious indication of the spirit of the age, and a strong testimony to the success of Wycliffe's aggressions on the monkish system. As far as hard words go, it would be difficult to surpass it in any language for bitter and malignant uncharitableness:—

"The devil's instrument, Church's enemy, people's confusion, heretic's idol, hypocrite's mirror, schism's broacher, hatred's sower, lie's forger, flattery's sink; who at his death despaired like Cain, and, stricken by the horrible judgments of God, breathed forth his wicked soul to the dark mansions of the black devil."²

² The poet Chaucer, who was a contemporary of Wycliffe's, brings precisely the same charge against the clergy of his day—all of them, be it remembered, sworn servants of the Pope:—

"Christ's people they proudly curse
With broad book and braying bell.
To put pennies in their purse
They will sell both heaven and hell."

When we read such statements, we may well ask, what good arises from the fact of a Church claiming infallibility, if the priests, who are the only channels through which this infallibility can flow to the people at large, convey poison to their flocks, instead of wholesome spiritual food?

The practices of these pardoners are described to the life by Chaucer:—

"His wallet before him in his lappe
Brimful of pardons come from Rome all hot.
In his mail he had a pive-bere,
Which, as he saide, was our Lady's veil.
He said he had a gobbet of the sail
That St. Peter had, when that he went
Upon the sea, till Jesus Christ him hent (caught).
He had a cross of laton full of stones,
And in a glas he hadde plege's tones."

The whole passage is well worth consulting. Vide Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, p. 53.

³ Church History, vol. ii., p. 362. Oxford, 1845.

⁴ Fuller, ut supra, p. 426.

In reply to these envenomed charges from an anonymous libeller, it may be deemed sufficient to quote part of a letter which was drawn up under the seal of the University of Oxford, in 1406, and laid before the Council of Constance, in defence of Wycliffe's character, about thirty years after his death. It affords the best proof how deeply his memory was honoured by a very large portion of the members of the University, who had the best opportunity of estimating his worth:—

"We signify unto you by these presents that his conversation even from his youth upwards unto the time of his death was so praiseworthy and honest, that never at any time was there any note or spot of suspicion noysed of him. But in his answering, reading, preaching, and determining, he behaved himself laudably, and as a stout and valiant champion of the faith, vanquishing by the force of the Scriptures all such who by their wilful beggary blasphemed and slandered Christ's religion. Neither was this said doctor convict of any heresie, either burned of our prelates after his buriall. God forbid that our prelates should have condemned a man of such honesty for a heretike; who, amongst all the rest of the Universitie, had written in logicke, philosophie, divinitie, moralitie, and the speculative art, without peers (equal). The knowledge of which all and singular things wee doe desire to testifie and deliver forth, to the intent that the fame and renowne of this said doctor may be the more evident and had in reputation amongst them into whose hands these present letters testimonial shall come."

This high testimony to the learning, piety, and worth of the Reformer did not prevent the Council of Constance, however, from passing the decree which we quoted at the commencement of this article, for casting forth his bones out of consecrated ground—a decree which the Bishop of Lincoln, as we have seen, carried into effect. But it is wisely remarked by the old Martyrologist—"There is no counsel against the Lord; for though they digged up his body, burned his bones, and drowned his ashes, yet the word of God and truth of his doctrine, with the fruit and success thereof, they could not burn, which yet to this day, for the most part of his articles, do remain." "They cast his ashes," writes Fuller, "into Swift, a neighbouring brook running hard by. Thus, this brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean; and thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed all the world over."³

THE SEE OF ST. PETER.—No. IV.

HAVING discussed, at some length, the question whether the Bishops of Rome are alone the successors of St. Peter, we now come to consider another proposition equally necessary (even if the former were decided in the affirmative) to support the supremacy claimed by the Church of Rome, viz.: Had St. Peter, by our Lord's appointment, a primacy implying a sovereignty of authority and jurisdiction over the rest of the Apostles? We are not disposed to deny that St. Peter may have excelled most, if not all, of the Apostles in personal endowments, which qualified him in an eminent manner for the discharge of the apostolic office, such as readiness of speech, boldness of spirit, love to our Lord, and zeal for his service, though it may well be doubted whether St. Paul is not his equal, at least, even in those qualities, as well as in resolution, activity, and industry. But the question is one essentially different from all this. St. Peter may have possessed a pre-eminence in talents or merit, which might have induced the other Apostles voluntarily to concede him that precedence which, even among equals, is due to those who indisputably excel others in good qualities or abilities, or even in age. The question is not whether St. Peter was, *primus inter pares*, first among equals, as one peer may excel the rest in the English senate, and still have no authority over them; but whether our Lord gave him such a primacy over the other Apostles as imported superiority in power, command, or jurisdiction—which, in short, vested the supreme power in the Church in St. Peter alone? We think there are many grave reasons for believing that Christ did not appoint any such supremacy to St. Peter.

We shall presently consider the several texts of Holy Scripture relied upon as proofs that our Lord granted him such supreme authority; but we would first call our readers' attention to some observations which appear to us to be worthy of the consideration of those who honestly desire to arrive at truth in this important matter.

1st. If such a commission from God was really bestowed upon any one of the Apostles to the exclusion of the rest, it appears to us to be but reasonable to suppose that it would have been granted in such plain and perspicuous terms, that no fair and honest mind could have any doubt or reasonable dispute with respect to it. If the Church of Rome be right it was the more indispensable, because it was not only necessary for the Apostles to bind and warrant their obedience to St. Peter personally as their chief, but necessary likewise for us and all mankind in after ages, as the sole foundation of our duty—a duty which we cannot heartily discharge without being assured of our obligation thereto by clear promulgation of God's will, either in the Holy Scriptures or some equally clear revelation.

³ Le Bas, ut supra, p. 312.

⁴ Fox, ut supra, vol. i., p. 606.

⁵ Fuller, ut supra, p. 424.

2nd. If so illustrious an office was instituted by our Saviour, is it not strange that there should be no express mention of it in the evangelical or apostolic histories, which record at large many matters of much smaller moment? The time when St. Peter was invested with that authority—the manner and circumstances of his instalment in it—the nature, rules, and limits of such an all-important office, surely deserved, among other occurrences relating to faith and discipline, to have been specially noted by the Holy Evangelists. What point more concerned the whole Church to know, in the most clear and unambiguous manner, than a matter of such vast consequence as the establishment of a monarch in that Church, and a sovereign of the apostolic college, as St. Peter was, according to the advocates of Roman supremacy.

3rd. If St. Peter was instituted sovereign of the apostolical senate, differing from the rest as a king does from his subjects, and possessing not merely a temporary, personal, and incommunicable office, as the other Apostles did, but a standing, perpetual, successive office; is it not reasonable to suppose that our Lord would have designated it by some distinct name or title to characterise it and distinguish it from others, as that of arch apostle, arch pastor, high priest, sovereign pontiff, pope, his holiness, the vicar of Christ, or the like, as men in after times found it necessary to do, when ideas of supremacy arose which were apparently unknown in the Apostles' times? St. Peter, however, never claims or is given in the Holy Scriptures any such title, or any other title than that of Apostle; nor, indeed, was any office higher than that of Apostle known to the primitive Church. If there had been, could St. Paul have been ignorant of it, or so envious or negligent as to pass by without notice the supreme officer in the Church, if such an one then had been known to him? In his epistle to the Ephesians, when treating expressly of the Church "as one body and one spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism," St. Paul says, "He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ;" and again, in writing to the Corinthians,—"And God set some in the churches, first Apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers." Why not first a pope, an universal pastor, a vicar or viceroy of Christ? Is it possible to believe that the office of supreme pontiff, or pope, was then existing and necessary for the perfection of the Church, and that St. Paul, in neither of these places, or in any other place, has taken the least notice of it? The early fathers also appear to have been equally ignorant of any such power or office in the Church. St. Chrysostom expressly asserts that "the greatest authority, and the top of authorities, is that of an Apostle: there was none before an Apostle—none superior, none equal to him;" and he particularly applies this to St. Paul.⁶

4th. The only other observation we shall here make, before proceeding to consider the arguments in favour of St. Peter's supremacy, is one which we think might well lead a candid mind to decide against any such pretension. It is this: that our Lord himself, on several occasions recorded in the Evangelists, declared against such a primacy, and seems to have instituted equality among his Apostles, by actually prohibiting them to affect or seek, to assume or admit, a superiority of power, one above another. Let us reverentially consider our Blessed Lord's conduct and words on these occasions.

St. Luke tells us (Douay Bible, chap. ix., ver. 44) that "while all wondered at the things He did, He said to his disciples, Lay you up in your hearts these words, for it shall come to pass that the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men; but they understood not his word, and were afraid to ask Him concerning it. And there entered a thought into them, which of them should be greater. But Jesus, seeing the thoughts of their hearts, took a child and set him by Him, and said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth Me, and whosoever shall receive Me receiveth Him that sent Me. For he that is the lesser among you all, he is the greater." St. Mark, likewise, probably describing the same occasion, says (Douay Bible, chap. xix., ver. 32-34)—"And when they were in the house He asked them, What did you treat of in the way? But they held their peace; for in the way they had disputed among themselves which of them should be the greatest. And sitting down, He called the twelve, and saith to them, If any man desire to be the first, he shall be the last of all, and the minister of all."

In like manner, immediately after the institution of the Holy Eucharist, St. Luke tells us (Douay Bible, ch. xxii., v. 24):—"And there was also a strife amongst them which of them should seem to be greater. And He said to them, The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and they that have power over them are called beneficient. But be you not so; but he that is greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is the leader, as he that serveth."

Could anything more plainly show that He did not

⁶ Ephes. ch. iv., v. 45, 11, 12.

⁷ 1 Corinth. ch. xii., v. 28.

⁸ Ἀρχὴ μὲν ἡ κορυφὴ τῶν ἀρχῶν. Chrys. Op. Tom. 3, Ben. Ed. 1721, p. 75 (p. 90, vol. 3. Paris, 1835).

τὸν δὲ Ἀποστόλων ἰσὺς οὐδὲν γίγνεται. Tom. 5, Or. 33.